

Rejoinder

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Parkvall's critique of my second column comes down to an argument that it is possible to make any language look about as complex as you like. I fully agree, but note that the reverse holds true too: languages can be made to look simple. This brings me to the central problem. Parkvall considers his to be an exercise in 'absence of weighting' and doing 'our best with what we have'. He makes the common error of assuming that linguistic typology is carried out without bias, pointing out that WALS was compiled 'by typologists *with no particular interest in creoles*' (his emphasis), thus suggesting that the use of WALS features is somehow above suspicion. But the typologists' representations of linguistic properties in the WALS reveal theoretical bias, as does Parkvall's selection from among those features,¹ and data availability has an impact on ranking.

Mostly, what I did in my reranking of Papiamentu was to fill in the blanks and make some fairly obvious corrections — along the lines of: yes, Papiamentu has a grammaticalized nominal plural (F14), and no, Papiamentu does not have separate forms to express comitative as opposed to instrumental (F22). Assuming that silence signals agreement, it appears that Parkvall agrees with my rescoring of features 18, 34, 46, and 48, and with my scores for his unscored features 9, 14, 22, 27, 31, 33, and 39. Moreover, my scores are identical to his for 33 unchanged

1. Reflecting again on Parkvall's feature selection, I note that that selection is not arbitrary. Basing myself on the WALS categorisation, Parkvall included around 25% of WALS phonology features, around 50% each of features classed as pertaining to morphology, nominal syntax, and simple clauses, 60% of nominal category and verbal category features, and 0% of WALS features pertaining to word order and complex clauses. In other words, his selection is not representative of the choices made by the compilers of WALS. Dismissing word order features on the grounds that 'it is not obvious that SOV is neither more nor less complex than SVO' (Parkvall 2008: 269) is a little too easy. There are word order features which could be interpreted as distinguishing between having/not having a particular feature of grammar, if one were so inclined. Why not count allowing something to intervene between a Verb and its Direct Object (WALS F84) as more complex than not doing so? Or having wh-movement (WALS F93) as more complex than wh *in-situ*? If this sounds counterintuitive, it is because the general strategy of counting *presence* as more complex than *absence* really works best for morphological distinctions.

features. Out of 53 features, we appear to agree on all but nine. So let's simply do the scoring over the 44 agreed-upon:

Scoring over 44 features agreed upon, yields a score of .466

Recall that Parkvall scored Papiamentu at .33, and that his 155 WALS languages have a mean score of .41. Doing 'our best with what we have' means that, depending on the data that we have available, a language appears then simple, then average, then complex. Whether Papiamentu is exceptional among creole languages in this regard remains to be seen.

Parkvall takes issue with my scoring of just 9 out of 53 features — enough, it seems, to claim that I attempt to impose my own set of rules for Papiamentu. Mainly, his critique exposes the messiness of feature interpretation:

- I stand corrected on F11, F26, F51, F53 which I treated incorrectly, given the intended interpretations of these features.
- On feature 45, which Parkvall had not scored at all, he provided an interpretation different from that of the corresponding WALS F113 (Parkvall 2008: 272, fn.b), and now faults me for abiding by his interpretation. Oh well.
- On F20 (politeness in pronouns), I consider Parkvall's interpretation to be wrong. Helmbrecht's description of the corresponding WALS F45 makes it clear that it pertains to a pragmatic strategy, and his statement that 'personal pronouns are not used in polite address at all' is not a feature requirement (as Parkvall claims), but an observation about the languages of (South-)East Asia that are classified in this way. The actual definition of the feature reads 'Second person pronouns are dominantly avoided for politeness reasons.' It is true that *bo* [2sg] and *boso* [2pl] can be used in contexts where a polite pronoun might be expected in languages which have them; hence, the Bible translations which Parkvall cites, and which contain a polite 2sg pronoun in the Dutch original text, contain *bo* as its translation. But Goilo (1972: 12) points out that '[t]he polite form for you (Bo) is translated according to the person it applies to, e.g.: *Señor, Señorita, Doctor*, etc.' and this is certainly the practice which I have observed among Papiamentu speakers.²

2. Perhaps Parkvall ought to treat pronoun avoidance as he does gender distinctions: having it is the first step towards complexity, but further features might need to be introduced to distinguish degrees of obligatoriness and the number of social distinctions which have to be considered as corresponding to degrees of complexity. Where gender distinctions are concerned, he defends the inclusion of interdependent features by pointing out that a simple dichotomy (with/without) does not do justice to the 'cline' of complexity found in some areas of grammar. He fails to explain though why a similar approach is not taken for other areas of grammar. For instance, why not include a feature which sets apart languages which have 'uncommon consonants' (WALS F19) from those which do not?

References

- Goilo, E.T. 1972. *Papiamentu textbook* (4th edition). Aruba: De Wit Stores.
- Parkvall, Mikael. 2008. The simplicity of creoles in a cross-linguistic perspective. In Miestamo, Matti, Kaius Sinnemäki, & Fred Karlsson (eds.), *Language complexity: Typology, contact, change*, 265–285. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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